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Spanish and Moroccan youths on social networks: A quantitative study in Spain.

Encarnación Soriano-Ayala^a & Antonio José González-Jiménez^{a*}

^aUniversity of Almería, Calle los Gallardos, s/n, La Cañada de San Urbano, 04120, Almería, Spain

Abstract

The purpose of this research is to identify the usage that young people make of social networks and if any differences exist between genders. To this aim we have based our study on a survey of 1680 students in Spain. From the results of the study, it is worth mentioning that when using social networks, boys engage in riskier behaviours such as going on blind dates and contacting with strangers.

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1. Introduction

In recent years, education has benefited from the advances made in information technologies, which has resulted in changes in the teaching-learning process. This way, we have gone from a classroom learning environment to E-Learning and B-learning, where the teacher programs what contents and competences will be learned in person and which ones will be self taught by the student.

Authors such as Cobo & Moravec, (2011) and Bjornavold (2009) call this type of learning “invisible” to refer to learning that occurs outside the classroom and without supervision by a training centre, and where information technologies greatly influence and carry a lot of weight with regards to the learning of competencies and contents. This type of learning has benefited from the latest advances in information technologies such as multimedia

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +34950015759

E-mail address: esoriano@ual.es and ajgonzal@ual.es

resources and social networks, which favours a restructuring and re-focusing of the methodologies, activities and evaluations of students; in short, of all the elements that comprise the teaching-learning process. (Barrera-Orsorio & Linden, 2009; González-Jiménez, 2013 and Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002).

Focusing on the use of social networks in education centres, although its history is short and is only recently being used as an educational innovation for favouring the collaboration between members of the educational community. Studies are available that provide us with data regarding the advantages of its use in teaching centres, for example Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, (2002) point out that the members of a teaching community will optimize the teaching-learning process through the use of social networks as an educational resource. Other studies such as those conducted by Pounder (1999, mentioned by Gomez, 2012) state the advantages of using social networks by teachers for individual type work, advantages of better knowing the peculiarities of their students, increase in satisfaction and motivation, innovation and exchange of learning, improved efficiency and professional commitment. Regarding this issue, the works of Hill (2007) has shown that the students of teachers that work on-line will obtain better results than those whose teachers work directly with the students.

Along this same line, Chavez & Soep (2005) indicate that the use of new technologies favours the emergence of ideas and new methods for solving problems. In this regard, Hill (2007) points out that the work conducted among equals through social networks eliminates the differences that are socially constructed such as nationality, age, gender or disability, allowing persons located in different geographical areas to share information, training and learning. This is what Soriano-Ayala (2013) call Neocommunication.

Hadfield, Jopling, Noden, O'Leary & Stott (2005); Boyd (2007) & González- Jiménez (2013) regarding this issue specify that the use of social networks as an educational resource by part of students favours group identity as a way of improving the learning process, carries some connotations with respect to more individual type work such as an increase in motivation (since it allows students to discuss the things they have learned and the experiences gained amongst each other), development of learning, access to digital educational contents and publication of multimedia files such as videos and pictures.

2. Society, minors and information technologies

A social network is an open multimedia space that favours a fast, constant and fluid communication where users receive written or visual information instantly and at the same time can post comments about this information. Another of its characteristics is that users can opt for anonymity or take on false identities while they accept and talk to other users, including minors. From this basis we ask ourselves how we can protect our minors against the use of information technologies such as social networks or an inappropriate use of a mobile phone. The latest study conducted by Fundación Telefónica (2013) called "Society of information" mentions that access to the cyber-world has evolved. This way, about 23% connect via a television, 63% through a computer, followed by 74% that use a laptop, 81% use tablets and lastly, 83% use mobile telephones. Of the main social networks that are asked about, the most widely used is Facebook with 85% of the users, followed by Tuenti with about 73% and lastly but progressively gaining ground is Twitter with 32% (González-Jiménez, 2013 and Romero & Díez, 2013).

This increase in access to the internet using a mobile telephone is causing behavioural changes as well as a change in the mentality of citizens, by either making purchases (according to this study, 25% of users make purchases using mobile telephones, of which 81% are unplanned) or in the field of social relationships to make friends or dating. Mainly this access to the internet takes place in those tasks called micro-activities, which occurs when we have "dead" time on our hands, which we use to access the internet, for example, when we are in line waiting to pay at a store, waiting for a friend, etc. Another study conducted by Orange and the Observatorio del Instituto Nacional de las Tecnologías de la Información (2010) titled "Study about security and privacy in the use of mobile telephones in Spain" shows that 8 of every 10 adolescents, between 15 and 16 years of age own their own personal mobile telephone. They use their phones for taking pictures (88%), which are posted on the internet (20.8%) and sent to other persons (48.2%). If we take a look at a younger age group, the data of this research indicates that 2 of every 3 persons between 10 and 16 years old own a mobile telephone. About 4% of these confirm having taken pictures or videos of a provocative nature and 8.1% affirm they have received information from strangers. This data shows that minors as well as adolescents are going to grow up part of a digital reality and

consequently will require a specific training in this regard.

One of the consequences of an inappropriate use of mobile telephones by minors and adolescents is the practice called "Sexting", which consists of sending pictures and/or video of a sexual nature to other persons via mobile phone. This information is primarily created by the sender (Unicef, 2012). From this practice, a series of consequences arise for the sender such as being subject of blackmail, public humiliation, lack of respect for their honour, integrity and image, child pornography and cyberbullying, among others.

Studies conducted about this matter such as "Sexting, an unknown threat" (Pantallas Amigas, 2012) carried out on 5898 Latin American citizens (1960 citizens from Brazil and 3938 from Latin America); indicate that 40% of those surveyed have engaged in this behaviour. Other research about sexting in adolescents has proven that young people engage in this behaviour as a way to replace sexual practices, also as a pre-requisite to maintaining sporadic or stable relations with their sexual partners, for blackmailing and emotional racketeering to preserve a relationship and on other occasions and not less unfortunate, to seduce, for flirting or experience sexual fantasies (American Life Project, 2009). Looking further into this concept, research conducted by Kimberly; Mitchell; Finkelhor; Jones & Wolak, (2012) and Baumgartner; Sumter; Peter & Valkenburg (2012), has found that adolescents that practice Sexting, engage in riskier behaviour and even more so, as they get older and in heterosexual relationships. Regarding gender, the research shows that girls that practice Sexting, engage in risky behaviour and will usually have problems with drugs and alcohol. They also view this behaviour as a preliminary stage to having sex. Normally it is the boys that request this practice.

3. Methodology

This research was conducted in the province of Almeria on a total of 1680 secondary school students, and the objective of the study was to find out how Spanish and Moroccan adolescents use social network sites.

In accordance with our general research objective, we opted for a quantitative methodology, using the survey method and for this purpose we designed a questionnaire comprised of 40 items on the likert Scale, distributed in 5 areas. Due to the amplitude of the research, in this study we only provided the results relative to the subject area "use of information technologies" comprised of 12 items with a Cronbach Alpha of 0.7.

This questionnaire was used on 1315 Spanish adolescents (685 boys and 655 girls) and 386 adolescents of Moroccan origin (280 boys and 85 girls) from secondary school.

4. Results

Descriptive statistical data collected using statistics package SPSS V. 20

Table 1: Descriptive data of students of Moroccan origin

	Supervised by an adult when they are using the internet	Use the Web as per the parent's advice	Acceptance by adults	Social networks, a safe place	Harassed on the internet	Posts pictures	I have contacted persons	Blind dates	Harassment, they tell their parents
Never	45,9	50,8	51,9	33,4	60,3	58,7	39,9	58,2	50,8
Almost never	12,8	12,8	15,5	21,5	13,3	9,8	13,6	11,4	9,5
Sometimes	19,6	15,2	17,4	26,1	13,6	14,4	25,5	16	12
Almost always	10,1	7,9	6,8	8,2	4,1	6,3	9	6,3	6,3
Always	6,3	10,1	4,9	4,6	2,4	6,8	6,5	3,5	8,7
Total	94,6	96,7	96,5	93,8	94	95,9	94,6	95,4	87,2

Table 2: Descriptive data of Spanish students

	Supervised by an adult when they are using the internet	They use the Web as per the parent's advice	Acceptance by adults	Social networks, a safe place	Harassed on the internet	Posts pictures	I have contacted persons	Blind dates	Harassment, they tell their parents
Never	51,8	56,6	79	30,6	86,4	70,9	62,1	85,4	47
Almost never	18,9	15,7	11,7	20,5	4,4	15,1	15,2	6,6	15,2
Sometimes	14,2	10,8	5,1	30,8	4	6,4	14,8	3,5	14,8
Almost always	6,9	6,5	1,1	8,7	0,9	2,9	2,8	1,3	2,8
Always	5,4	8,4	1,2	6,9	1,1	2,7	2,7	1,3	2,7
Total	97,2	98	98,1	97,1	96,8	97,9	97,9	98,1	97,6

Data regarding the initiative of contacting strangers via the internet showed that 14.8% of the students have contacted strangers sometimes, 15.2% almost never and 62% state that they have never engaged in this type of behaviour. On the other hand, the data about Moroccan students is more alarming since 25.5% confirm that they have taken the initiative to contact strangers, 9% does so almost always and lastly, 40% and 13.6% respectively, confirm that they have never or almost never engaged in this type of behaviour. Regarding other important data about blind dates with persons they have met on the internet, the data shows that 85% of Spanish students state they have never accepted a blind date in this manner, only 6.6% state that almost never and lastly, a low 1.3% state that they always accept these types of invitations. In the case of Moroccan students, the percentages vary since 16% affirm that they sometimes accept invitations, 6.3% almost always accept and 58% as compared to 85% of their Spanish counterparts, never accept these blind date proposals.

Lastly, we were also interested in knowing if students have ever been harassed through the internet and if they consider this multimedia safe for them. Focusing on the first question, 24.3% of Spanish students mention that every time they have been harassed on the internet, they have told their parents; 3.7% state that they have almost always notified their parents and 47% state that they have never been harassed on the internet. In turn their Moroccan counterparts indicate that 8.7% have been harassed and have notified their parents. Lastly, 50.8%, much like the Spanish students, state that they have never been harassed on the internet.

For the purpose of finding out if differences exist between the students according to gender, we have applied the Mann-Whitney U, where we find differences between Spanish girls and Moroccan girls with respect to the boys of both groups in the variables “my parents tell me what pages I can visit” ($p=0,027$), “acceptance of invitations initiated by adults on social networks” ($p=0,001$), “internet is safe for young people” ($p=0,001$), “I post my pictures on the internet” ($p=0,000$) and “notifying parents of the harassment” ($p=0,002$). Only in variable “acceptance of blind dates” ($p=0,000$) do we find significant differences between boys and girls. From this data we can conclude that girls have developed defence mechanisms against inadequate and fraudulent use on the internet. It is the boys in both cultural groups who engage in risky behaviour while using social networks.

5. Conclusions

As mentioned at the beginning of this article, society advances at a rapid pace with the progress made in the research and development of communication technologies. This progress favours the enrichment of society of course, of any of its areas but also includes a series of risks as previously stated in this study. If our youths are going to grow up in a digital world, we need a specific education that favours its use and eliminates aspects that are hazardous to our minors (González-Jiménez, 2013). Unfortunately behaviours such as sexting, cyberbullying and harassment are practices that occur every day on social networks. The results of our study leads us to believe that Spanish as well as Moroccan girls are more likely to avoid engaging in risky behaviour when using communication technologies. For example, not accepting invitations from strangers, not posting pictures of themselves and their

personal life and notifying their parents when they encounter a problem while using social networks. On the other hand, we do notice a lack of guidance on the part of the parents when it comes to deciding what pages they may visit and which ones they may not. Focusing on the male gender, Spanish as well as Moroccan, have engaged in risky behaviour such as going on blind dates with strangers, and in the case of Moroccan boys this behaviour is more worrisome since 25.5% have made contact with complete strangers on the internet. From this data we have determined that there is a need to raise awareness in our youths regarding the dangers derived from contacting with complete strangers; dangers such as blackmail, emotional racketeering, loss of privacy and identity. In conclusion, it is worth mentioning that prior to carrying out any future studies, we must first determine why our youths are communicating with complete strangers; if it is to make new friends or engage in sexual relationships (Houck; Barker; Rizzo; Hancock; Norton & Larry, 2014).

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